

Seven KY Tech area technology centers become home for Kentucky College Coaches

For some students, transitioning from high school to a postsecondary institution is difficult. Quite simply, they need help. Because of a mentoring program entitled Kentucky College Coaches, students will now receive the help they need to graduate from high school and go into a postsecondary institution. Across the Commonwealth, approximately 60 *career coaches* are now at host sites – including coaches for seven Kentucky Tech area technology centers (ATCs).

How did this come about for Kentucky Tech? Forming partnerships for the benefit of students has always been a priority of Kentucky Tech area supervisor Mary Stratton. As part of the Office of Career and Technical Education's district improvement plan, she was looking for ways to provide KY Tech students with an equal opportunity to learn and ultimately increase student achievement. She was able to connect some very important dots to get Kentucky Tech included in an AmeriCorps grant because of her association with Gayle Hilleke, Kentucky Campus Compact (KyCC) executive director.

Stratton:

"I want to personally thank Gayle Hilleke for her willingness to support Kentucky Tech in this endeavor. She has been instrumental for the inclusion of area technology centers in the AmeriCorps grant.

"The Kentucky College Coaches Program is something students will benefit from in the Kentucky Tech school district as well as throughout the Commonwealth. Coaches will work with counselors and other school leaders to help students address the barriers they face. We believe access to career counseling will help relieve some of the difficulties Kentucky Tech students experience so they can better transition into a postsecondary institution. Furthermore, we are hopeful that coaches will be able to successfully prepare students for the challenges of college.

"Over the next three years, we expect to see positive results for those who were recipients of this assistance."



According to an October 9, 2010 Northern Kentucky University press release Kentucky Campus Compact, in partnership with Berea College, was “awarded an AmeriCorps grant of \$908,000 annually for up to three years to develop the Kentucky College Coaches Program.” The program will be administered through KyCC which is housed on the campus of Northern Kentucky University, its fiscal agent.



Kentucky’s coaches are mainly students who have recently graduated from college because they are close in age to high school students and can communicate well by relating to their problems and concerns. All coaches are required to undergo *an intensive training program* “to learn effective coaching and mentoring strategies, build content knowledge to assist in postsecondary education advising, and develop leadership, team building and career skills.”

OCTE service coordinator Debbie Seider serves as the office liaison for Kentucky Tech’s career coaches and has been invited to the training sessions.

Seider:

"I've been impressed with the coaches at the area technology centers and see the enthusiasm they have in helping students."

"The three R's of education used to be Reading, Writing, and 'Rithmetic.' In the last several years, educators have been talking about Rigor and Relevance; but, they often leave out the third and in some ways the most important R – Relationships. Studies have shown that if students develop a relationship with an adult at the school, they are more likely to graduate and become productive citizens."

"In my opinion, the career coaches program gives those students who often fall between the cracks a person to relate to. I also believe that students who have someone close to their own age, who have been to college and who are willing to help them with the hurdles, will help these students to reach their goals. The career coaches are helping students to see purpose of postsecondary training and how to get it."

"My hope is that we will be able to continue the program beyond this three year grant."



Photo by Tim Thornberry.



KY Tech Kentucky College Coaches

Photo taken during 2011 KYCAN College Access and Success Workshop held in Frankfort, Kentucky from February 21-22.

*Left to right: Krystal Johnson, KY Tech-Mayfield/Graves Co. ATC; Seth Bevard, KY Tech-Mason Co. ATC (and Maysville CTC); Seth Blakeslee, KY Tech-Nelson Co. ATC; Chris Ryczek, KY Tech-Carroll Co. ATC; Shawna Thomas, KY Tech-Caldwell Co. ATC; and Lindsey Hill, KY Tech-Shelby Co. ATC.
Not pictured: Kristen Powell, KY Tech-Fulton Co. ATC.*



At the local level, coaches are busy developing relationships with students to understand their interests, problems, and what can be done to overcome their respective problems. They work to keep students in school and help them understand the importance of education and pursuing a career. They are also responsible for setting up field trips to colleges, helping students prepare for the ACT and Compass tests, holding financial aid workshops, helping students fill out college applications and the FAFSA, and encouraging their students to succeed. It's all about successful outcomes.

Here's an example of what some of Kentucky Tech's college coaches have to say about what they are doing for students:



Chris Ryczek
AmeriCorps Kentucky College Coach
KY Tech-Carroll County Area Technology Center



"I believe that every day I make a difference in the lives of these children by being a constant proponent for going to college and consistently challenging the students to pursue a post-secondary education. These students do not always have the support and encouragement from family or faculty to advance their education and I am here to change that."

"I also make a difference in the lives of these students and their families by debunking and demystifying the college process; including unaffordable tuition and other setbacks which scare people away from education."

"This is so important because without me, these students may not even acknowledge the possibility of a post-secondary education. Without this motivation, they may merely move on to a high school level job in their home town, never take control of their lives and never amount to their true potential!"





Krystal Johnson
AmeriCorps Kentucky College Coach
KY Tech-Mayfield/Graves Co. ATC

"Having the opportunity to teach these students to raise their expectations of themselves can change their entire perspective on education. This position is something that has been needed in area technology centers (ATC) for a long time. Many of our students spend half of their day at our school - five days a week. In their minds, their education revolves around what they are doing in their classes at the ATC. They need someone who understands how career and technical education works to help them pursue their options after high school. For some students the answer may not lie in college, but in obtaining an internship/apprenticeship or simply learning the skills to find a good job."

"The KCC program has allowed the need to be temporarily filled. They are giving students, not only in ATC's, but in high schools all across the state the opportunity to be given individual attention, and to learn from someone who has just completed the college journey. This program gives students opportunities that they may not have had otherwise, opportunities that will teach them to grow not only as students, but as future contributors to our society."

Seth Blakeslee
AmeriCorps Kentucky College Coach
KY Tech-Nelson County Area Technology Center

"As well-intentioned as they may be, educators in today's schools are extremely overwhelmed and rarely have the time to give students the individual attention they need to succeed. My position allows me to do what most teachers have always wanted to do - give students that attention. Kids are blown away when they realize that my main job is to be available to them. I'm able to give them my full attention and answer their questions, walk them through tricky applications, and challenge them to make tough decisions. If I weren't in this school, a lot of these kids would take the easy route, and for most of them that route doesn't include higher education."



"My students are some of the most talented people I know. If they fall through the cracks, a lot of that talent will go to waste. It will be more difficult for them to find jobs that challenge them and force them to develop their talents to their full potential. Society will miss out as a result."

To learn how to become a college coach, contact Mary Stratton at MaryA.Stratton@ky.gov . For more about the Kentucky College Coaches Program, visit <http://kycompact.nku.edu/programs/kcc>.